and gives Instructions to those who would follow it. Travellers went either by the land roads—of which the most frequently traversed were one by way of the Black Sea, the Volga, Hi, and Kansu, and one through Persia, the Tarim River basin, and Kansu—or by sea via India to the ports on the south coast oi China.

Due largely to the fact that he left behind him a record of his travels and observations, the most famous of these medieval adventurers was a Venetian, Marco Polo. Several years before the Mongols had made an end of the Sung rule in South China, Nicolo and Maffeo Polo—the father and uncle of Marco—had come to Cambaluc. Khubilai was much interested in them and dispatched them to the West with letters to the Pope asking for a hundred teachers of science and religion. Because of a papal interregnum the answer to the request was delayed. When at last the Polos started on their return journey, they were accompanied by only two of the hundred missionaries asked for, and these, frightened by the dangers in the way, turned back before going very far, The two brothers, however, were undeterred and in due course, together with Marco, whom they had taken with them, reached China. Their route was across Persia, the upper reaches of the Oxus, the Pamirs, and the valley of the Tarim. Khubilai received the Polos with cordiality (1275) and seems to have treated with especial kindness Marco, then about twenty-one years of age. Marco entered his employ, holding various positions, among them some which carried the young Venetian over much of China.

After a little more than a decade and a half in China, in 1292 the Polos left it as members of a large company appointed to

escort a princess to Persia, where she was to become the wife of the reigning Mongol khan. The route this time was oy sea—from Zaitun to Sumatra, India, and Persia—and the Polos, after seeing their charge safely to her destination, returned to Venice. It was probably while a prisoner of war in Genoa that Marco dictated an account of his travels and observations to a fellow captive. The result was a book which was to pass through many editions and which was to have a large influence upon European knowledge of geography and geographic discoveries. Few works of travel have had so wide a circulation or such far-reaching effects. Columbus, for example, owed much to it. Even to-day, it is one of our best